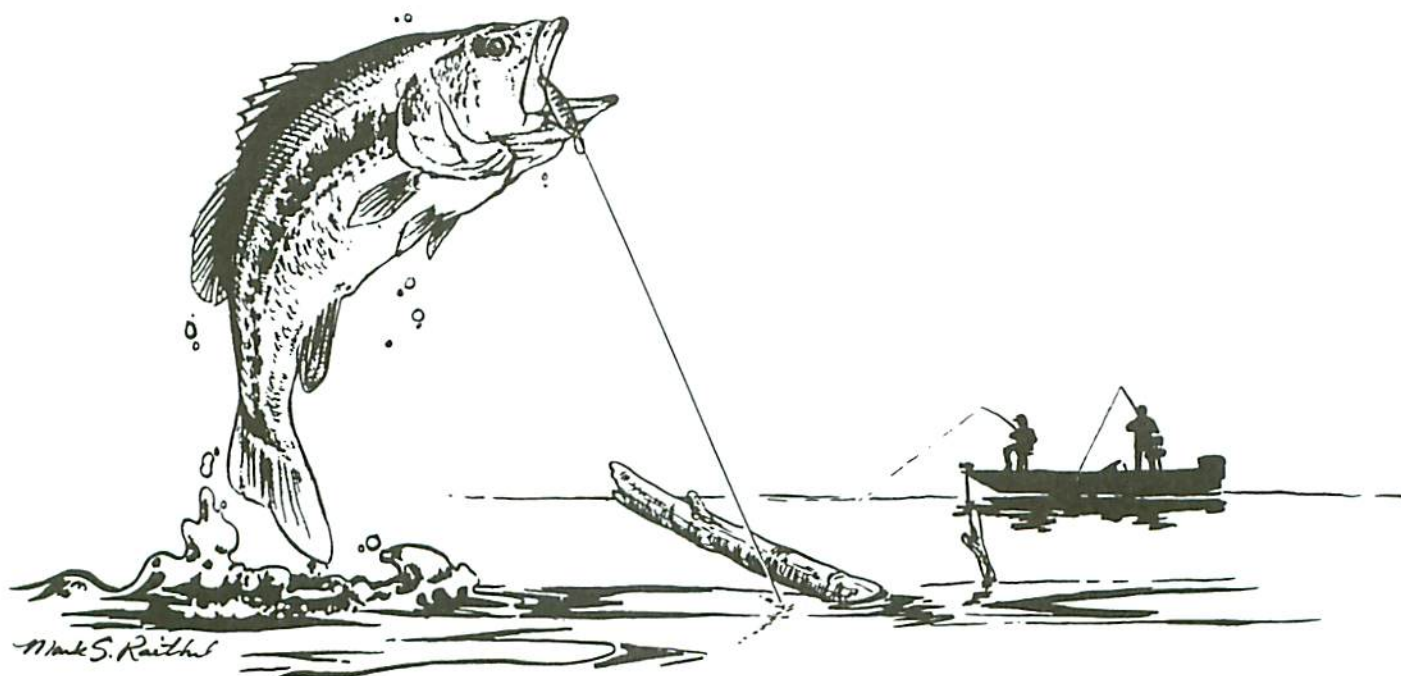




MANAGING YOUR POND FOR TROPHY LARGE MOUTH BASS



Would you like to grow trophy-size largemouth bass in your pond? In Missouri, a bass over 22 inches long or weighing more than six pounds is often considered a trophy. In many ponds, largemouth bass of this size are rare (one or two per acre). However, you can increase the number of trophy largemouth bass in your pond if you have the desire and resources to manage your pond specifically for them. Trophy bass management requires a sincere commitment both by the pondowner and by everyone who fishes the pond.

Managing your pond for trophy bass may not provide good all around fishing. Your efforts to produce more trophy bass may result in few quality-size bluegill. The harvest of large bass will be low, because catch-and-release fishing will be required for almost all bass over 15 inches.

You should not stock channel catfish, crappie, or other predators, because they compete with bass for food and space. You must have control of access to your pond to ensure that all anglers follow the rules.

IS IT A TROPHY POND?

Not every piece of land is good for growing crops. This is also true for ponds when growing a "crop" of trophy bass. Some ponds are better than others. The chances of growing trophy bass are better if your pond meets the criteria listed below.

Size

Trophy bass management should be limited to ponds that are one acre or larger. Smaller ponds are more difficult to manage. The pond should be at least eight feet deep throughout the year.

Watershed

The area of land that drains into a pond is its watershed. The ideal watershed has 10 to 15 acres of land for each acre of pond. The best watersheds are maintained in permanent vegetative cover, such as native grasses or hardwood forests. If this is not possible, a filter strip of grasses, at least 100 feet wide, should be maintained around the entire pond.

Water Clarity

The clarity (clearness) of the water in the pond is very important, because bass must be able to see what they intend to eat. Water clarity of two to four feet is ideal. Extremely clear ponds lack the fertility needed for good fish growth. Ponds with a slight greenish color are most desirable and productive for growing fish. Trophy bass management should not be attempted in ponds that stay muddy most of the year.

Aquatic Plants

Aquatic plants should not be allowed to cover more than 20 percent of the pond's surface area. Excess plants make it difficult for bass to find small bluegill to eat.

FOOD FOR BIG BASS

Many pondowners think their bass have plenty to eat because they can see prey species, such as minnows, crayfish, tadpoles and small bluegill around the edge of the pond. However the sighting of prey species in the pond does not mean that bass will have enough to eat.

For each bass to gain one pound it must eat five to ten pounds of food. In ponds where food is inadequate, bass get enough food to stay alive, but they grow slowly, never reaching their size potential.

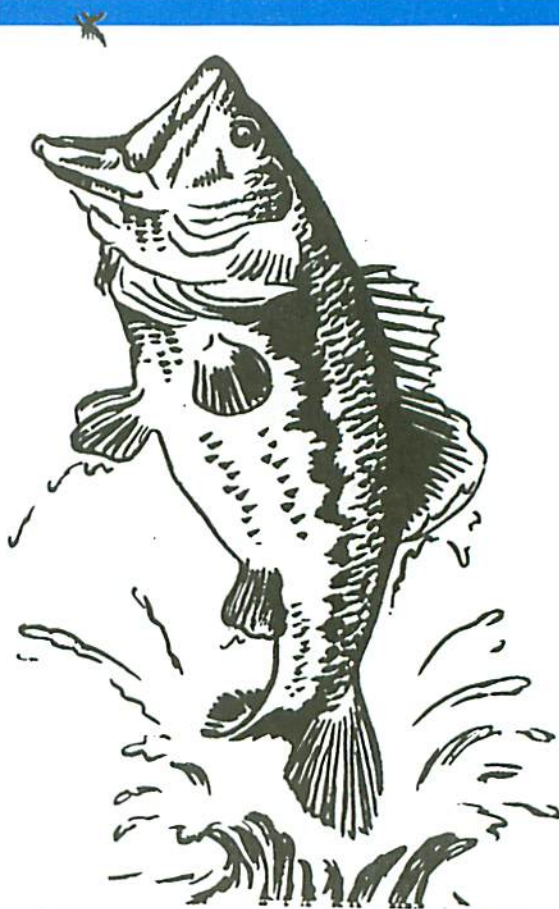
Many Missouri ponds have few trophy largemouth bass because they do not have enough food items of the right size to eat.

Different sizes of bass require different sizes and types of food for optimum growth. Bass are efficient predators and normally pursue food items that contain sufficient energy to make the chase worthwhile. For example, it would be efficient for a five-pound bass to expend the energy to chase a seven-inch shad, but not a one-inch bluegill.

Bass growth can be greatly enhanced by increasing the types, sizes, and amount of food items. The following prey species are proven trophy bass producers.

Bluegill

Bluegill are an important food fish because they produce lots of young and spawn throughout the summer. Bluegill are the primary prey for small bass, and some will grow large enough to satisfy



bigger bass. A pond managed for trophy bass usually has high numbers of bluegill less than six inches long. Such a pond might satisfy adult anglers seeking big bass and kids who just want to catch fish (small bluegill), regardless of size.

Gizzard Shad

The likelihood of producing trophy bass is increased when gizzard shad are stocked in a pond. Adult gizzard shad are the primary prey for large bass. However, if large bass are overharvested, most of the gizzard shad may grow too large for bass to eat, providing little benefit to the bass population.

Golden Shiner

Golden shiners are excellent prey for small bass and they also grow large enough (10 inches) to satisfy the appetite of large bass. Golden shiners usually need restocking every three years.

Fathead Minnow

Fathead minnows are sometimes stocked in new ponds prior to stocking bass fingerlings. After the initial stocking, fathead minnows are quickly eaten. Additional stocking is not effective.

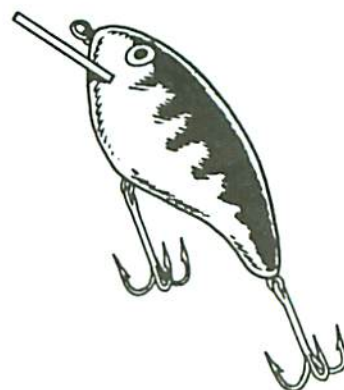
Table 1.

New Pond (no fish present)		Number of fish to stock per acre			
Species	Size (inches)	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Bluegill	2-4	500			
Fathead Minnow	1-3	500			
Gizzard Shad	7-12			(3 years after bass) 20	
Golden Shiner	3-5	200		(restock every 3 years)	
Largemouth Bass	3-5	75			



Table 2.

Old Pond (fish present)		Number of fish to stock per acre if not present			
Species	Size (inches)	Number			
Bluegill	4-6	300			
Gizzard Shad	7-12	20	(3 years after bass)		
Golden Shiner	3-5	200	(restock every 3 years)		
Largemouth Bass	6-8	50			



Crayfish

Crayfish may be stocked to provide additional food for bass, especially in new ponds. In most ponds, crayfish are quickly eaten if additional cover is not provided. Installing one or more crayfish castles (piles of flat limestone rock or similar cover in 1 to 3 feet of water) may provide refuge for enough adult crayfish to allow reproduction and maintain this source of food.

STOCKING

Producing trophy bass begins with correct stocking. It is critical that the proper types, sizes, and numbers of fish are stocked at the right time. Fish for stocking should be purchased from commercial fish dealers. The tables above will

guide you through the proper stocking procedure. If your pond contains any species that are not mentioned, the pond should be renovated before new fish are stocked. Contact your local fisheries management office for advice on fish removal.

SUPPLEMENTAL FEEDING

The growth of trophy bass can be increased by providing supplemental feed for prey fishes. Feeding will improve the condition of prey fishes and enhance their reproduction, which in turn, provides more food for bass.

Use floating catfish pellets, available at most feed stores, to feed prey fish and follow these guidelines:

1. Automatic feeders should be used, unless you

live close to the pond.

2. Feed at the same time (preferably in the afternoon) and location each day. Feeding only once or twice a week will not help.
3. Feed only what can be eaten in 15 minutes, not exceeding 10 pounds of feed per acre per day.
4. Feed when water temperatures are between 65 and 85 degrees.
5. Feeding area should be at least four feet deep.
6. A 6' x 6' square constructed of three-inch P.V.C. pipe can be placed on the surface of the pond to contain the feed.
7. If feed is not readily accepted, stop feeding until the problem (lack of oxygen, disease, etc.) is solved.

HARVEST

Just as bass control bluegill numbers by preying on them, the angler controls bass numbers by removing them. Historically, bass overharvest was a common problem, but now many ponds suffer from bass underharvest, which results in too many

bass for good growth.

Harvest of small bass is needed to maintain good growth of remaining bass. Refusal of anglers to harvest small bass will greatly reduce your ability to grow trophy bass in your pond.

Do not harvest bass until the third year after stocking. Then, anglers should harvest 30, 8- to 12-inch bass per acre each year. If 12- to 15-inch bass begin to appear in poor condition (skinny), harvest five per acre each year.

Catch-and-release fishing should be the rule for bass greater than 15 inches, unless a trophy is kept for mounting. Fish should be handled gently with wet hands and returned to the water immediately to avoid harm. Using artificial lures instead of live bait will increase the survival of released fish.

A good record-keeping system will help monitor the success of your trophy bass management and provide valuable information to diagnose problems and determine the best solutions. Recording the sizes, numbers and types of fish caught during each fishing trip is essential. For more information refer to the Aquaguide, "Good Record Keeping Means Better Fishing."

Managing a pond for trophy bass does not come easily. However, if you follow these guidelines and your pond has the proper physical characteristics, you should be able to grow more big bass than ever before and, possibly, catch that bass of a lifetime.

Contact your local fisheries management office for answers to specific questions about trophy bass management or other pond-related information.



Partial funding provided by
Federal Aid in Sport Fish
Restoration

